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THE OLD SOAK

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AVE you ever met the Old Soak? He is fast vanishing. He will soon be as extinct as the carrier pigeon, the dodo, the great auk, or Sinbad's roc. It almost seems a pity that science could not preserve him by the vi-taphone or some other device that would let us see and hear him as he was. Yet even then much of the peculiar flavor that made him unique would be lost. Don Marquis placed him on the stage as Clem Hawley, probably the very best picture of this disappearing species which has ever been given.

The Old Soak was lovable, but a total loss to any community. He was well-meaning but as unreliable as a bootlegger's word. He was a "good fellow" when with the boys down at the corner saloon, but his wife had a different opinion of him. His sons usually viewed him as a

horrible example and became teetotalers themselves, while his daughter blushed with shame if he met her while she was in the company of her friends.

Possibly there can be no stronger indictment of the beverage liquor traffic than some of the Old Soaks whom we have known. Many of them were men of culture, men of exquisite refinement, men with the perfect courtesy of the Old School. Even in the ultimate degradation to which they had fallen, they still had an air. One felt that they had been, even though they were not, gentlemen. The contrast between what they were and what they had been and the still more tragic contrast between what they were and what they might have been, constitutes an indictment which the liquor group can never answer.

The Old Soak never planned to be an old soak. He merely planned to be sociable. All he sought was a little agreeable color and fragrance in life. He believed he could "take it or let it alone." Like Joe Jefferson's "Rip Van Winkle," he often said, "I won't count this one," but nature counted it, and the uncounted steins of beer, the uncounted glasses of wine, the uncounted pints of whisky soon changed the careless, laughing good fellow into the hopeless Old Soak.

The Old Soak did not want to reform. With Omar Khayyam he might say:

"Though wine hath rent my robe of honor,
well,
I often wonder what the vintners buy,
One-half so precious as the stuff they sell."
All that ambition meant to him, all that life held out of promise in his glowing

youth, all his dreams of achievement, of fame and honor, all these he has bartered for his glass of wine. After a time that glass of wine became the strongest, most influential spirits which the malignant ingenuity of man could devise.

The Old Soak was not really old. He merely looked old. His gray hair, his uncertain walk, the trembling of his hands, his lack of consecutiveness when he talked, did not make him venerable. His life had not ripened into mellowed years of fruitage but had been blighted into premature decay. Unlike Browning's Rabbi Ben Ezra, he could not say:

"Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be."

The Old Soak would never invite youth to a pilgrimage that companioned his. He knew that his old age was "unwept, unhonored and unsung." Like Shakespeare's Wolsey, he had felt "a frost, a killing frost," and "honors, friends and all he hoped to have" had been swept away. Like Cleopatra, he had dissolved a priceless pearl in a glass of wine. He knew it, but he knew it far too late.

Among the ancient Hebrews, slaves were freed in the Year of Jubilee. Some slaves, however, declined to accept manumission and the law directed that as evidence of that refusal these were taken to the door posts, where an awl was driven through their ear into the portal. Unseen by the physical eye, the stigmata of unbreakable slavery marked the Old Soak. His fetters had become so great and so much a part of himself that he had lost even the will to cast them off.

As a nation, we do not sanction the

making of Old Soaks any more. Instead, we are emphasizing the making of leaders of the world's dreams, for the raw material of an Old Soak is also the raw material of a great statesman, a great poet, a great leader of mankind. That easy accessibility to liquor which made possible the development of a Clem Hawley has passed away forever in this nation. There may be a few, who because of some diseased appetites or depraved tastes, may crave the fiery draughts of liquor, but the wholesale production of the Old Soak has been abandoned. One might reverse the application of the epitaph Shakespeare wrote for a dead king, "Take him for all in all. We shall not look upon his like again."

AMERICAN ISSUE PUBLISHING COMPANY
WESTERVILLE, OHIO

